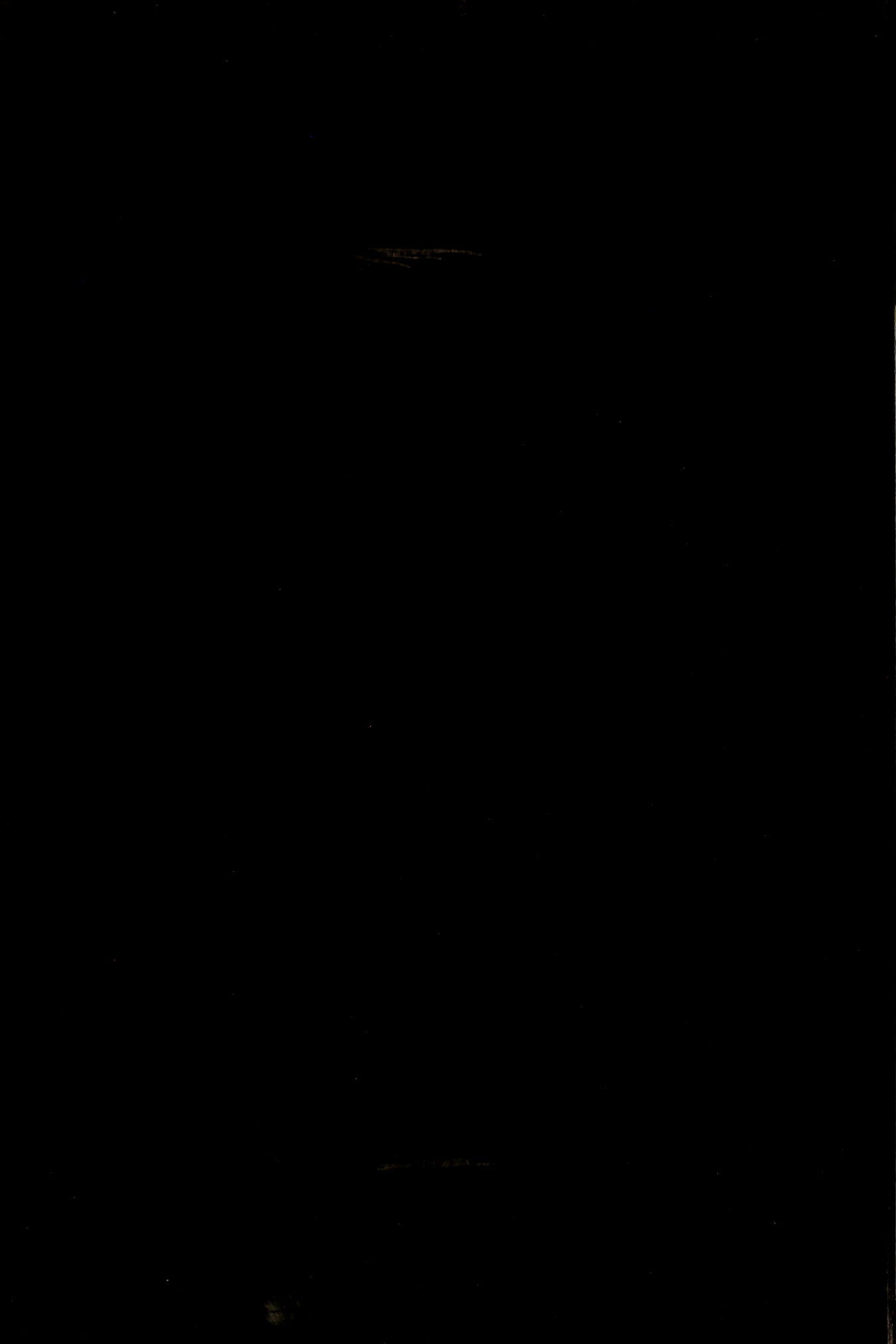


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With the Author's Compliment

THE

NEW NATIONAL GRAMMAR.

BY

EDWARD E. BOWEN, M.A.,
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FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, AND ASSISTANT-MASTER AT
HARROW SCHOOL.

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THE NEW NATIONAL GRAMMAR.

MORE than a year ago the Head Masters of the Public Schools which came under the survey of the Commission met for the purpose of endeavouring to carry into effect one of the Commissioners' suggestions, that of some common agreement upon a Public School Grammar. The question was an important one, so important indeed that the Greek Grammar has been consigned to the future. The discussion upon the Latin was limited by two decisions which were very soon arrived at, so far as the existing information, supplemented by conjecture, leads us to infer. One was, that it was expedient to adopt as a basis some already existing text-book: the other, that it was not expedient to take any advice on the subject from other persons, either of distinguished scholarship or of much experience in the teaching of grammar.

It will be obvious that the adoption of the first of these two decisions implies one of the following alternatives:—either that the attainment of a very good Grammar is not important compared with the necessity of having some Grammar at once; or, that there are strong *à priori* grounds for believing that the basis of some very good Grammar must exist at the present moment.

In favour of the second there is, perhaps, more to be said. For it may be urged that time, again, was of importance, or that the scholarship and experience already present was suf-

ficient, or that it could not be readily found, or that in some cases private advice may have been taken. Or, lastly—which was probably the real ground—it may have been thought that if there was the disadvantage of a limited experience, there was the advantage of a distinct responsibility.

These decisions having been arrived at, it only remained to examine the existing Latin Grammars, and adopt one. As was perhaps, under the circumstances, not unnatural, the Grammar of Dr. Kennedy was chosen. It has been somewhat remodelled from its then existing form, and, subject to a few more alterations, chiefly in type and arrangement, the first part of it at all events, the “Primer,” has been definitely adopted.* The assistant masters of the various schools will be requested to teach it to their forms, and the authorities of the other schools will virtually be forced to receive it.

There were many persons who, at the time when the scheme was proposed, doubted whether it really is at the present moment desirable to stereotype one Grammar for permanent national use. They looked to past attempts of the kind, and found them not wholly satisfactory. They observed the present activity in the pursuit of such studies, and hesitated to pronounce that a time of rapid progress is the best time to crystallise a system. They remarked in how many ways the opinions of a scholar of to-day differ from those of thirty years ago, and felt some misgivings whether the scholars of thirty years hence will yield implicit obedience to the laws of to-day’s enactment. They noticed the rapid progress, above all, in philological inquiries, and wondered how far it was likely that the compiler of a National Grammar would be able to satisfy the demands of philological science. Such views as these are but little dependent on

* Since the above was in type, Dr. Kennedy has explained to the writer that the Primer as published is the book of the nine Headmasters prepared by them for the nine schools.

the discretion with which the choice of text-books was made. At this moment it is impossible to pronounce whether they were or were not, the views of a small minority of teachers.

Be this as it may, the compulsory adoption of this particular Grammar is an extremely important matter. By the courtesy of Dr. Kennedy, the assistant classical masters at the schools have received specimen copies of two books, the Primer, which is distinctly adopted, and the Grammar, which is not yet absolutely received as part of the English educational system. I have reason to think that an opinion unfavourable to both of them is very widely spread. It is spread at all events almost as widely as the horizon of my own personal knowledge. It is from a very strong impression that this opinion, if it exists, ought to be made known, that I write these few remarks. I should be very sorry if anything that I say in disrespect of the Grammar itself should in any way be considered as implying disrespect to its author, who, though I still disagree with him wholly, knows ten times as much grammar as I do.

The chief part of what I have to say will consist of remarks on "The Public School Latin Primer," and on the teaching of grammar in general. As regards the "Primer," I wish to call attention to details only as far as they are either samples of their kind, or seem to involve a principle. In the first page, for instance, it might perhaps be urged that the statement that "a syllable is short if its vowel is short," is contrary to the frequent evidence of the senses. But such cavillings as these, which involve nothing beyond themselves, I shall endeavour to omit.

By Grammar two things are generally meant, quite different from one another. One relates to the inflexion of words, the other to their combination: and unfortunately these two branches of learning are too often mixed up together. A certain amount of acquaintance with the rudiments of accidence is indispensable to every learner. A boy cannot begin to construe till he has some idea how *dominus* and *amo* are declined. But no amount of

knowledge of syntax need be acquired as a preliminary to easy translation. It is true, certain ideas of concord and of government are present to the mind of every child who reads "*bona mater amat me.*" But these ideas are so primary, so simple, so fixed, indeed, in the mind from the use of the English pronoun, that it would be hardly fair to conceive them as already a code of syntax.

Now, I will begin by saying that the universal tendency of the best modern theories of education is towards teaching largely by experiment. To ascend from example to abstraction is the true rule of instructing as well as of investigating. I will go further, and say that in this particular question of classical teaching I know hardly a single scholar who is not of opinion that the common system of teaching syntax by abstract rules conveyed in a difficult style, and in a tongue at first unintelligible to the learner, is a grievous waste of time, and, what is worse, a waste of the learner's energy and readiness to be taught. What is true of syntax is true of the over-development of accidence. It is a waste of time for a boy to learn how a word is declined, with which he will never meet for the first two or three years of his progress.

Grammar, in the sense of a real analysis of language, should be an end, not a means. When a boy has well learnt how to translate a Latin author, what the force of the words and sentences is, and what is their corresponding value in his own tongue, he is then ripe for approaching the science of Grammar. M. Jourdain talked prose just as well, though he had never known the fact, and a student of Latin may have a perfect mastery of the "Prolative Relation" without ever having heard its name in the pages of Kennedy. It is certainly true that the analytic faculties are quite worth cultivating. But so are the faculties of domestic administration and forensic oratory. One cannot begin everything at once. What I contend is, that valuable as the analysis of language is, it is best studied in a

tongue tolerably well known than in one almost wholly unknown. Indeed, it is well open to question, whether the analysis of argument is not quite as useful a study ; and if it were possible to make school teaching encyclopædic, I should be very glad to see the elements of logic taught to the sixth form at Harrow. One limitation, however, I could make. I could not endeavour to teach a boy the connexion of arguments if he had never yet conducted a discussion on any point whatever in his life.

If I knew a tutor whose chief anxiety it was to render a pupil able to construe a Latin author in as short a time as possible, and who was obliged to start from the beginning, I would give him this advice : “ Teach,” I would say, “ a specimen or two of each declension, and the most important tenses of the conjugations. The others may be learnt gradually, and may be pointed out from time to time. Then at once plunge your pupil into construing. Go through the *Delectus* from end to end. Tell him every word he wants to know if he cannot find it out immediately ; or even—but this may be a heresy—tell it him without his looking it out at all.* Begin some easy author, giving all possible help, and leaving out any construction that is too hard. Work in everything with a view to ease, and provided that you can get through very much, do not be over particular about the very well. In this way read chapter after chapter, pointing out, explaining, telling, never allowing time to be wasted in mistakes or in fruitless searches. The accident will gradually teach itself, the syntax will explain itself without being taught. Your pupil will get through five times as much

* It is a heresy to which I am rather partial. The time spent in turning over the pages of a dictionary is, oftener than not, time wasted. In a Homer lesson of sixteen lines an industrious boy will sometimes look out as many as forty words. He will spend more than twenty minutes, that is, on mere manual and distasteful labour. I should be very glad if a great portion of this educational treadmill could be got rid of.

as his friend who is toiling over his New National Grammar ; he will build his own rules for himself, and, by means of your help, he will notice the unusual words and constructions, because he will come across them so often. As his mind is gradually more able to understand a hard sentence in English, it will similarly be competent to attack a more obscure one in Latin. He may now be told what the "Prolative Relation" is, because he has often used it, and is familiar with it. As for the difficulties which torture and distress so often the minds of boys who learn Latin with no help but a code of rules which they cannot hope to understand, your pupil, like the American who had crossed the Alps, will "guess he did pass some risin' ground!"

I fancy I hear some educationist of the old school say, at this point, "I would not take your education at the price." I cordially agree with the spirit of the sentiment. But what I have proposed is not an education. It seems to me to be the quickest and easiest way of teaching a boy to understand a Latin writer, and it will be generally allowed that this is a success worth having. I do not disparage the virtues of perseverance and of resistance to difficulties, nor the intellectual merits of the exercise of a critical ingenuity. But I am of opinion that the course of the most *facile* curriculum gives already plenty of scope for both. Although the business of the teacher may well be, like that of the sons of Vulcan of old, to make smooth ways for the feet, and render the rough places tame, yet the most royal road to learning will never be without its uphill. But if in any way it be said or implied that there is an advantage in leaving difficulties because they will have to be overcome,—that intellectual temptations must be kept in order to strengthen the intellect,—that a difficult method is in any conceivable degree superior to an easy one, I at once dissent *toto cælo*. Let us be prepared to abandon the barbarous doctrine that anything that is unpleasant can ever be, in virtue of its unpleasantness, good. It is of a piece with those other moral barbarisms which used to

make boys endure needless restraint because restraint is good for boys, or compelled them to bear needless hardships because it is of hardships that life is full. We shall never have reason to congratulate ourselves on a perfect method of education till boys can habitually come up to their lessons with as little repugnance as that with which a man sits down to his work.

I wish it could be more generally known how stupid a stupid boy is. If Grammar writers only knew how difficult, often how impossible, it is, to convey an idea in an abstract form into the mind of a pupil, even of an average intelligence, they would be more sparing of their hard phrases and harder rules. In the new Latin Primer a boy is supposed to learn in his very first lesson on the noun substantive that the genitive case is the case of the "proprietor," as in the words "*cujus donum?*"—"whose gift?" "*vir*"—"a man's gift;" where a man represents the proprietor. Is it really necessary that this idea, which even now a common mind has some little reluctance to accept, should be laboriously driven into the untrained intelligence of a mere child? Why not tell him at once that "*vir*" means "of a man." If it is true that, in the language of Voltaire, a boy of four understands the meaning of ownership as well as a man of sixty, the philosophic conception which Dr. Kennedy is anxious to implant will not be long in revealing itself in Latin as well as in English. I believe that, to a boy of mere ordinary ability, this philosophy of Grammar is as hard to grasp as the Binomial Theorem to a senior classic beginning algebra. And if it is difficult, it is repulsive as well. A boy may well hate his books when he sees such a mountain of toil before him. On page 19 of the Primer, I find the names of ten different kinds of pronouns. On page 23 is the heading, "Periphrastic Conjugation." Half of page 31 is devoted to "Semiconsonant Verbs;" half of 37 to "Quasi-passive and Semi-deponent Verbs." This in a Primer to be taught to classes of boys, of one half of whom we know that it is only with hard and long labour that they can be brought to master the easiest

and commonest formulæ! When it comes to the more difficult syntax, it is really not necessary to push the examination to detail. I do not know to what kind of learners the larger Grammar is intended to be taught; but I am certain that I know more Latin than most of the sixth form at Harrow, and that there are a multitude of observations in that laborious work which I can only faintly and diffidently hope that, after a school and college education, I am beginning to understand myself.

There can of course be no doubt whatever that Dr. Kennedy's *accidence*, whether encumbered by unnecessary matter or not, is very much superior in intrinsic merit to the old Eton Grammar. It is for the most part only to what seem encumbrances or useless philosophies that any objection lies. But it is difficult to conceive a Grammar as really intended for boys beginning Latin, which gives five specimens of the first declension, and eight of the second; the first, too, including the declension of "*Dea*," for the purpose of including the unusual form "*Deabus*." The third declension positively includes no less than twenty-seven forms! In the verbs Dr. Kennedy has attempted a compromise between conservatism and philosophy; in order not to break off entirely from antiquity, he subordinates arithmetical order to strict grammatical propriety, and puts his third conjugation after his fourth. In nomenclature, again, there are one or two half measures, of which it is difficult to see the value. Dr. Kennedy talks of the infinitive mood as other people do in most parts of the book. But when the conjugation of the verb comes on, at once we have the heading, "The Verb Infinite." Now it would be hard to say what the advantage of "Infinite" over "Infinitive" is, considering that whatever the idea involved in the word "*amare*" may be, the word "*amare*" itself is not infinite in any sense, and is only of, or belonging to, an infinite idea,—and that there is no proposal in the Primer to speak of the genitive, dative, and accusative. But the change only shows the tendency of the teaching. The author wishes to group "*audiens*" and "*audire*" under one heading, and "infinitive"

being already in use, he invents the inappropriate "infinite." The conjunction of the two may be philosophical: for argument's sake we may grant that it is. But does Dr. Kennedy mean to say that when these two sentences are written down—"I, *hating* you, strike you;" and "*To hate* is pleasant,"—any single boy in any school, of the age of ten or twelve, can see a connection between them? Granted that it is not wrong to group them. Is it right to burden a child's memory by coining a questionable word for the purpose?

One would have supposed that at any rate Dr. Kennedy could not well advance further in this direction than the coining of a word. In page 5 of the Primer he actually coins a letter! The ordinary mind gazes upon such an undertaking with a sentiment approaching to awe. The sign, he tells us in a note, stands for "any mute or liquid." Placed before *um*, it is equivalent to a combination of *rum*, *dum*, *tum*, and the rest. The force of Grammar can no further go. But, unless study conducted on Dr. Kennedy's principle is to have the fruit of developing fresh vocal ligaments for his consonant, it is difficult to understand how on earth the pupil is to pronounce it.

It is understood that the "memorial lines" form an integral part of the teaching of the new Grammar. The only ray of consolation which seems to present itself in the perusal of this gloomy poetry arises from the recollection that masters will not have to learn it as well as boys. The Grammatic Muse declares herself in the second page of the Primer, before even the parts of speech are unfolded, and thus she addresses the infant mind:—

- (1) The guttural mutes, c, g (k, q)
May be entitled K-sounds too.

This is the beginning of the second lesson that a young gentleman of some nine summers is supposed to learn. In the same breath, almost, he will read—and commit to memory, let us hope—

- (2) In Latin sounds we vainly seek
For aspirates, like those in Greek.

Certainly the young gentleman seeks for nothing of the kind. All that he knows of Greek from his elder brother is that it is a language so amazingly hard that even its accidence is obliged to be written in Latin. A few lines more, and we come to a metrical dissertation upon *j* and *u*:—

Old Rome had neither *j* nor *u*;
The sounds, but not the signs, it knew;
Till *j* came in to mark the sound
Which in i-consonant was found;
And with it *u*, that all might see
The vowel-power contained in *v*.

“Old Rome” seems at first sight a little disrespectful, though the pupil may, perhaps, be made to understand that it means the more ancient Romans. But passing over the form and sound of the lines, and looking at their signification, I venture to surmise that there is not one single person in the country, besides Dr. Kennedy and a portion of the committee of head masters, who would give it as their opinion that these ideas, as conveyed in a poem to be committed to memory, are the most necessary furniture of a mind which has had as yet exactly one lesson in Latin.

The next page declares that there are three parts of speech, nouns, verbs, and particles; and the muse is called in to subdivide them, in a poem of thirty-two lines. And here begins to show itself one of the very worst faults of this verse system. A boy learns

The Interjection feeling notes;

(as though the interjection was learning to play the piano—)

As *ecce natat*, “lo it floats.”

Now we know how impossible it is to prevent a boy from learning anything rhythmical in a very marked sing-song. What then will be his opinion of the quantity of the first syllable of

natat? Or, again, in the following four lines, how is he to make up his mind whether *canunt* is long or short, if he has not the book before him?

Verbs tell of somewhat happening,
 As, *homines cānunt*, men sing.
 The *subject* *homines* we state,
 And *cānunt* as the *Predicate*.
 Another instance if we try,
Mors est propinqua, death is nigh,
Mors subject, *est* is *copula*,
Propinqua *complement*, we say:
 And here the Predicate is blent
 Of Copula and Complement.

I could not help continuing the passage, as it seemed to have something of the run of Sir Walter Scott. Classical education is intended to improve the taste. But with regard to the first line, let me ask three questions. To a youthful mind, do not persons and books tell of things happening just as much as verbs do? Do not verbs tell of things happening, supposing that they do so at all, in one language as well as another? What does it matter to a young boy what a verb tells of, so long as he sees what it is?

The anomalous nouns are not dealt with at great length; though it is judiciously added—to be learnt by heart with the rest—that Of such examples many more Enrich the careful reader's store. But in the gender of nouns Pegasus fairly runs riot. Page follows page of substantives tortured ingeniously into rhyme, and labelled as masculine or feminine, though how the masculine ones are to be sorted from the feminine, when the pupil has learnt the canto through, it is quite impossible to say. The list of *common* nouns consists of thirty-nine; and I think I have some boys in my pupil-room who, if they once see that "miles" is common, will soon show up "fortissima miles" to end their hexameter lines. But when twenty-nine nouns follow soon after, which are

specially masculine, and which run in the same metre and style as the first, is it likely that they will be kept separate in the learner's memory ? The latter, it may be remarked, are all *exceptions*, and the rule itself is the following elegant and perspicuous one :—

Third-nouns Feminine we class
Ending *is*, *x*, *aus*, and *as*,
S to consonant appended,
Es in flexion unextended.

This, perhaps, is more like the “*Lyra Innocentium* ;” but it is harder.

The memorial lines fortunately do not continue throughout the accidence ; and it may be again repeated that with the skeleton of the book—if there were but one-fifth part of it to be put into the hands of young boys—I do not wish to find fault. Nothing could be better than the tables of irregular verbs on pages 52, &c., which, fortunately, are not given in verse. I pass to the Syntax.

It is here that I most cordially dissent from the tradition of the elders. And it is here that I believe I shall gain the most cordial assent of the greater number of the teachers in our public schools. I doubt whether any instrument of educational torture within the memory of the present generation can compare with the expedient of compelling boys to learn, in Latin, a quantity of rules, of which it is certain that they will not understand a great number, that they will remember still less, and practise least of all. Take the first concord :—do we ourselves, when we write Latin prose, ever say over the Latin words at each verb we come to ? Is the principle of concord fixed in our minds because we once learnt the rule in Latin, or because we have seen so many nominatives and verbs in our reading that the idea has become part of our nature ? So with the second. Show a boy when he does his first exercise, that adjectives have numbers, genders, and cases, which must be all attended to, and he will not need the

embarrassment of polyglot thought on the subject. A *very* few, perhaps, in English, might be admissible. Something is to be said for the old *Fungor, fruor, &c.* But the number of these, which, in reality, are but short lists, is barely half a dozen, and even these may be, with advantage, curtailed. *Supersedeo* certainly governs an ablative, but the word is so rare that a student will not need the knowledge till he is of age to use his dictionary intelligently. However this may be, consider for a moment the value of the following: it will be found in § 121 of the “*Syntaxis Memorialis Prima.*”

Ablativus est casus rerum quæ circumstant et adverbiali more limitant actionem, ut Causæ, Instrumenti, Modi, Conditionis, Qualitatis, Respectus, Pretii, Mensuræ, Materiæ, Originis. Definit etiam puncta Temporis et Loci.

I try in vain to picture to myself the intellect of a rather stupid boy brought face to face, in any other way than by mere rote, with the mass of ideas thus presented to him. Ablativus respectus! In all seriousness I ask myself whether since the creation of the world any person has been a jot the wiser from meditating on the ablative of respect. To parcel these things out in this fashion is a charming exercise for a mind which needs some practice in analysis. Of what other use can it be to any living soul?

Here, again, are some specimens. Under the heading of the “*Infinite Verb*” we have:—

§ 150. Gerundii transitivi constructio Gerundiva fit, Objecto casum Gerundialem induente, Gerundivo numerum et genus Objecti.

§ 151. (2.) Necessitatem significat attributiva constructio Gerundivi, in Verbis transitivis.

It may be said that it is good mental training for a boy to be able to refer all his constructions and usages to an abstract or

general law. That he should be able to appreciate a general law is, I grant, a good thing. But it should be a law which is clearly in his own mind founded upon a collection of instances; and if he rightly understands the instances, it will matter little in what terms he states the law. If he does not understand them, the law is worse than useless. Suppose that we are teaching history to a pupil. There are many examples to be seen, and many general laws to be drawn; and it is possible to conceive of the laws as governing the instances, in the same way in which a teacher with the "Primer" in his hand might tell a boy that a particular usage was correct because of Rule §151. But would any one think of teaching the principles first? Should we make our pupil commit to memory, at the outset of his historical reading, a law declaring that a feudal tenure implies (or does not) a previous conception of a family, or that a colonial settlement prospers least (or most) when its centrifugal force is strong, and then wait till he has read Guizot and Mill to be able to put the rules to the text? What would be thought of a teacher of physiology, who should compel his victim to start with some such formula as this:—

Omnes substantiæ edibiles, quales sunt panis, caro, poma, Revalenta Arabica, et similia, ipsæ per se corpori alimento esse nequeunt, succumque, ut dicitur, quo maturius conficiantur, digestivum postulant.

Perhaps the case might be put more strongly still; and it might be more truly analogous if such a rule were represented as even preparatory to the practical use of food.

I cannot but feel that there is a serious side to this question. It is indispensable to good instruction that there should be confidence between teacher and taught. There is little likelihood that a set of boys will do their best to learn, if they do not think that their master is doing his best to teach them. If he has to spend his time and that of his form—and not only their time, but

their energies—in work which he knows to be useless to them at the early stage which they have reached, this confidence is gone at once. As it is, in the few subjects in which the matter taught is at times of little importance or of doubtful truth, we know how our own vigour relaxes, and whatever sympathy we have managed to awaken is destroyed. It will be a difficult trial, not only for the energy, but even for the conscience of a master, to attempt to incite activity on false pretences—to stimulate an intellectual zeal which will have to spend itself on crabbed rules and childish doggerel. To a fifth or sixth form pupil I can teach the usages of the predicate or the history of inflexion, and trust that I am doing him good. To instruct a boy of ten in anything beyond mere formulæ, I should feel to be doing him a mischief.

“What then,” it may be asked, “do you wish, after all?” I reply that, for myself, I think a common Grammar unnecessary, because Grammar is already taught to very young boys too much, and a new liturgy may serve to enhance the worship we already pay to it. If it is to be made at all, I should wish it to consist of the minimum of *accidence* requisite for a boy beginning Latin. I would also have a scientific Grammar, analytical and philological, for elder students. This is not the opportunity to offer any opinion which of the several extant Latin Grammars either is or might be made the best for the purpose. But I can see no conceivable reason why each school should not choose its own. It happens that the present head masters of the English schools are themselves good scholars; and I cannot understand that they are likely to have any difficulty in determining, especially with the aid of their colleagues, which book is, from time to time, the best. Only I would keep this last quite separate from the first; and I would no more enforce the learning by heart the uses of the subjunctive mood upon a boy beginning Cæsar, than I would oblige him to get up beforehand the article “consul” in the Dictionary of Antiquities in order that whenever he came to the ex-



pression he might fully understand at once the meaning of that ancient office.

I have now finished the remarks which I had to make. I hope I have said nothing which can give offence. I am aware that in some respects the opinions which I have enunciated are extreme, and that many who will agree in their general tenor will find something to dissent from in the arguments which I have used to support them. But I will again state my belief that some such views as those which I have put forward are held very widely by masters of the English Public Schools, and by scholars in other places, whose names are deservedly better known than mine.

If it be so, I would suggest that such views ought to be taken into account. There is, I would urge, sufficient ground for a reconsideration of the question. At the least, any definite step may be postponed till public opinion shall have been able to declare itself.

That public opinion has not done so as yet, is due to the privacy with which the matter has hitherto been conducted, and of which I do not complain. But now it would seem time to invite its fuller expression. That it should be consulted is most important. At a time when science is advancing so rapidly it is not too much to say that classical education is on its trial. Perhaps the Report of the Commissioners has given it a much longer lease of life. But that its decease should be unduly hastened will be less regretted, even by its admirers, if the system adopted in the proposed Latin Primer is to be presented to the nation as that upon which the intellect of the coming generation is to be trained.

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